

Statement of Representative John D. Dingell  
Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on  
Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs  
April 25, 2013

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One hundred and ten years ago last month, the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge was established by President Theodore Roosevelt as the first wildlife refuge. H.R. 638 would take away the ability to do what President Roosevelt had the foresight to do. Over the last 100 years, presidents, both Republicans and Democrats, have created roughly 90 percent of the refuges that exist today.

I remember hunting in Humbug Marsh on the Detroit River with my dear old dad when I was a kid and promised it would be my life's mission to make sure these types of areas would exist for generations to come. These refuges are treasures, to be enjoyed by millions of people every year who want to hunt, fish, or just enjoy the outdoors.

The refuge system includes 150 million acres with over 700 species of birds, 200 species of fish, and hundreds of species of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. According to a study by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, use of these national wildlife refuges generated \$1.7 billion in economic activity and supported 27,000 private sector jobs. These economic benefits were almost four times the amount appropriated by Congress to the refuge system in FY 2006. In the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in Southeast Michigan, walleye fishing alone brings in over \$1 million each spring.

Establishment of a refuge does not instantly make the federal government a steward of an area of land. It simply allows for the Fish and Wildlife Service to enter into a partnership with state and local governments. The Executive Branch must go through an exhaustive public process providing ample opportunity for the public, communities, and stakeholders to weigh in on proposals. If a community doesn't support it, the Fish and Wildlife Service does not go forward – nor does the Service acquire land from anyone but a willing seller or participant. The Federal government simply does not take land from businesses or homeowners.

I believe we need to continue to give private landowners and local governments the flexibility to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service to create and manage these critical refuges and I ask members of this subcommittee to oppose the legislation.

I would also like to express my support for H.R. 1384 by Mr. Sablan. As a co-sponsor of this bipartisan legislation, I believe it is an excellent step in the right direction to help maintain the refuge system. This new wildlife refuge system conservation stamp would give hunters, anglers, and conservationists the ability to directly support operation and maintenance costs for refuges and keep these wonderful treasures alive and open to everyone who enjoys the outdoors.

Finally, I would also like to offer my support for H.R. 1300 by Mr. Runyan. Volunteers on wildlife refuges provide 20 percent of all the work done in the system and their value is something to be nurtured and treasured. This program contributes the equivalent of nine full-

time employees annually to the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in my home district. Reauthorizing the volunteer program makes sense.

Thank you for allowing me to speak here today.